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Ex-Agent in Spy Probe Tried 3 Panels to Land Job

Plea Bargaining Called Possibility

A former CIA covert agent, under federal investigation for allegedly going to work for the Soviet Union, tried unsuccessfully to join the staff of three government committees that oversee U.S. intelligence operations, government officials and other sources said yesterday.

But law enforcement sources said the agent, David Barnett, described as in his late 30s or early 40s, did do part-time work under contract for the CIA after he came under Soviet control. A congressman said a tip from the FBI thwarted Barnett's efforts to join the House intelligence committee staff, although the panel's staff director disputed that, saying the committee did not learn of the investigation until several months after Barnett applied for a job.

Sources who asked not to be named said a wide range of activities by Barnett designed to obtain U.S. intelligence secrets for the Soviets had been the subject of a complicated investigation by the FBI and the Justice Department for more than a year.

A federal grand jury in Baltimore is expected to act on the case by the end of this week, they said.

Intelligence sources said Barnett was a higher-ranking officer than the most recent CIA employee convicted of working for the Soviets, former watch officer William P. Kampiles.

Nevertheless, they said, he did not have access to information as sensitive as the KH-11 spy satellite manual that Kampiles sold to the Soviets in 1978. "Barnett did not compromise whole intelligence systems," one source said.

The Justice Department, FBI and CIA refused to discuss the matter. But it was understood that government attorneys had worked out an agreement with Barnett's lawyer under which the former CIA man would plead guilty or no contest to charges against him.

The exact charges the government planned to bring could not be learned, and some officials expressed concern that public discussion of the case might snag the arrangement.

Thomas K. Latimer, staff director of the House intelligence committee, said it was his understanding that the FBI "had confronted the man with the allegation about the KGB (Soviet intelligence connection) and they told us he had confessed."

Barnett could not be reached for comment at his home in Bethesda. Neighbors said the family was seen leaving the two-story house early yesterday morning. Children playing near the home yesterday afternoon said the Barnetts have three children, two boys and a girl, all in elementary school. None attended classes yesterday, they said.

From a congressman and several other sources, it was learned that Barnett tried and failed to gain employment with the Senate and House intelligence committees and with the Intelligence Oversight Board, a watchdog committee in the executive branch.

Sources said Barnett received a substantial sum of money from the Soviets, and that money rather than ideology apparently was his motivation. The New York Times said he received \$100,000, but columnist Jack Anderson said on ABC-TV's "Good Morning, America" program that the figure was \$80,000.

Sources said Barnett functioned mostly abroad as an undercover operative for the CIA, first as a contract employee from 1958 to 1963 and then as a regular member of the agency's clandestine Directorate of Operations from 1963 to 1970.

Barnett then left the CIA to form his own business but continued to work as a part-time contract employee of the agency, particularly in 1979, the sources said.

They said Barnett's effort to get a job with the Senate Intelligence Committee occurred in late 1976 or early 1977, when there were no staff openings. Committee staff director William G. Miller said through a spokesman that Barnett's application "was filed along with hundreds of others and he was never seriously considered for employment."

Rep. Robert McClory, a senior member of the House intelligence committee, said Barnett applied for a job with that panel about a year ago but was turned down after the committee was tipped by the FBI that he was under investigation.

McClory, R-Ill., said in a telephone interview. "The FBI warned our committee at that time that he was under investigation. I don't think they identified him as being with the KGB, but they said they were investigating questions about his loyalty and activities on behalf of a foreign government."

Latimer, the committee staff director, said, however, that the House panel did not learn of the FBI investigation until months after Barnett tried to get the job there.

An intelligence source said Barnett also tried and failed to win a job with the Intelligence Oversight Board, a three-member panel created during the Ford administration to hear allegations of wrongdoing by intelligence agencies.

A spokesman for the board declined to comment on Barnett.

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